

“Anger and the Believer in Christ”

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Introduction

We live in an angry culture. All of us have been the target of someone’s anger. It could have been in the grocery line, the drive-through, at home, at work, or at an athletic event. We have all been stared at, flipped off, honked at, and barked at by upset, angry people. Our television programs are filled with anger, rage, revenge, murder, rape and other crimes of passion. We are exposed to violent movies and violent scenes in the six o’clock news. Where does all this explosive emotion come from? Why are we so angry?

For one thing, life has never been so unsettling and uncertain. As Americans, we are moving from a modern to a postmodern culture that is changing the way we think about life, marriage, parenting, purpose, values, and the meaning of our existence. We are at war and live on the brink of conflict habitually. We have become the world’s police force, relief agency, loan officer, and target of hatred.

Our modern culture is crumbling. Jobs, companies, families, stocks, and neighborhoods are facing insecurities like never before. The institutions that were once the backbone of our culture have become pockets of embittered battles, strife and insecurity.

This has had a profound impact on us as individuals and as a result, has deeply affected our relationships. The home in particular, is not the safe oasis or haven it once was. In far too many cases, it has become another battlefield. Unfortunately, we have become accustomed to verbal, emotional and physical attacks and abuse. We seem to have a high tolerance for outbursts or expressions of anger (particularly verbal) and often will *justify* our behavior because of the offensive nature of the stimuli that created the angry response.

This *justification of anger* is the basis for what I would like for us to discuss in the following pages. Just in case you don’t clearly hear me in the print to follow, I want to make one thing absolutely clear at the outset. The feelings of anger are normal, healthy, and in some settings, even righteous when expressed. The problem is not the feeling but rather the way we express this feeling to others. Our expressions of anger are what need the scrutiny of Scripture, not the experience of the emotion.

Feeling Angry is not Sin

One cannot read the Old Testament without coming away with the idea that God is a God of wrath. Balanced by His love, mercy and compassion, He is seen frequently expressing anger and bringing judgment on the earth, individuals, Israel and other nations. We call this righteous indignation. We also see this clearly in the book of Revelation.

Since we are created in the image of God, it is only reasonable to assume we also will experience the same emotions that God does. This not only would include the positive feelings of love and mercy but the negative emotion of anger as well. (This is not to say that anger is a negative emotion for God. But rather, man's experience of anger is usually felt as a negative emotion.) This is confirmed by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:26 when he states, "BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger." This is clearly an admission that anger will erupt in the life of the believer, and we are to expect it. But somehow, we have accepted the fact that every believer will experience anger and have either not been taught or have forgotten what else is written about the subject. Solomon, Jesus, Paul, James and Peter all have some profound insight into this subject and some stern warnings about how we *express* our anger.

Verbal and physical expressions of anger are frequently sin

Would you say that the way God expresses His anger in righteousness is the same way that you express yours? If you are honest, you would have to admit that your anger is not usually over injustice, cruelty, oppression of widows and orphans, or idolatry. If you are like me, you get angry when you are cut off in traffic, your children don't obey you, you get stepped on at work, or when you go through a drive-through and don't get the right sandwich.

When the emotions boil up inside of us and we begin to express those feelings in the words we say and in our bodily ranting and raving, we are not usually expressing a righteous anger but rather a fleshly anger. This is where we are in need of clarity and instruction. What do I do with the stuff I feel? How do I express my anger and not sin? How do I handle these strong emotions in a healthy and life-giving way rather than in a destructive and relationally harmful manner?

Solomon on Anger

Solomon had a lot to say about this subject in Proverbs. We won't discuss each passage, but I have grouped similar passages together under one heading or idea.

There are many passages that warn us about allowing anger to "bubble up" in our verbal expressions. Solomon describes the one who utters his anger as a fool and the one who holds his tongue as wise. For instance, it says in Proverbs 29:11:

*A fool [self-confident] always loses his temper,
But a wise man holds it back.*

He also describes the difference between someone who makes cutting remarks and someone committed to conflict resolution. In 12:18 he states:

*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

We see the emphasis on keeping cool in conflictual situations in 17:27–28. The Bible says:

*He who restrains his words has knowledge,
And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
²⁸Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;
When he closes his lips, he is **considered** prudent.*

In 19:11a he states:

A man's discretion makes him slow to anger.

If all that were not clear enough, Solomon warns us to be careful with all our words. Everything we say is important, both what we say and especially *how* we say it. In 18:21a he says:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Solomon seems to understand anger quite well. He obviously has experienced both being angry and experiencing others' passion as well. In the following passages, he describes the problems associated with anger. He is basically saying if you want to act like a fool, lose your temper and say something:

A quick tempered man acts foolishly (Proverbs 14:17a).

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).

A wise man will control both his temper and his words. He will stay objective and measure what he has to say in difficult or tense situations.

Another result of anger expressions in our relationships is to stir up strife. As we will see later when we study Paul on anger, he teaches that someone who stirs up strife is sinning. Solomon exhorts us to avoid anger expressions for the same reason.

*A fool's lips bring strife,
And his mouth calls for blows.
⁷A fool's mouth is his ruin,
And his lips are the snare of his soul (Proverbs 18:6–7).*

*An angry man stirs up strife,
And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression (Proverbs 29:22).*

*A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,
But the slow to anger calms a dispute (Proverbs 15:18).*

Our goal in tense and conflictual situations is resolution and the resulting experience of oneness, unity, intimacy and bringing glory to God. Solomon is clearly teaching us that the wise person will control his anger and therefore avoid causing strife.

We must also be careful about associating with someone who tends to get angry. Instead of keeping friends and growing closer with someone given to anger outbursts, we are to limit our relationship with them for the sake of not learning to be just like them. In 22:24–25 he states:

*Do not associate with a man **given** to anger;
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
²⁵Or you will learn his ways
And find a snare for yourself.*

This is particularly troublesome if that person is your spouse. You can't "not associate" with them. However, we can learn to put relational limits called boundaries in place. We will discuss this at length in chapter 8, "Boundaries."

Another way we can get ourselves in trouble is to relieve someone from the consequences of their anger. Proverbs 19:19 says:

*A **man of** great anger will bear the penalty,
For if you rescue **him**, you will only have to do it again.*

If someone you know has gotten themselves into trouble as a result of expressing their anger, don't be in a hurry to rescue them. If you do, you will likely have to do it again and again. When an angry person has to pay consequences for their outburst, it is the natural discipline God has ordained for this kind of foolishness. Don't interrupt it.

There are many passages in Proverbs that describe the lifestyle of a fool. Frequently the fool is pictured as always having an opinion and desiring to express it, running off at the mouth without being asked, or laughing and scoffing at wisdom or knowledge. The fool is also described as living a life of folly without understanding or possessing discipline. Included in Solomon's critique is the comparison of the life of a fool with a quick-tempered man. Proverbs 12:16 states:

*A fool's anger is known at once,
But a prudent man conceals dishonor (Proverbs 12:16).*

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29).*

A quick-tempered man acts foolishly (Proverbs 14:17a).

*A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind (Proverbs 18:2).*

To escalate verbally during a difference of opinion or ideas instead of staying objective and in control is not only considered unwise, but Solomon would label that behavior foolish.

Solomon, speaking for God, has a lot to say about how to handle our anger. I will reserve my comments on this aspect until the end of this article. Let's now consider what Jesus had to say and demonstrate to us about anger.

Jesus on Anger

Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of Christ*, is possibly the most powerful depiction of the suffering and agony of the last 12 hours of Jesus' life. I can't think of anyone more qualified to speak on how we are to handle our anger than Jesus. If anyone had justification for retribution and outrage, surely our Savior did.

When Jesus was teaching on the mountainside, He outlined the attitude we are to have if we are truly kingdom people. In Matthew 5:1–12, Jesus says to consider ourselves blessed if we are poor in spirit, if we mourn, are gentle, if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, and are peacemakers. He said if we are His followers, we are to consider it a blessing if we are reviled or persecuted for being a disciple. He says in verse 12a, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great." This means that if I get in some sort of trouble because I tell the truth, turn in someone who is giving out insider information, call the police because I suspect my neighbor is selling drugs out of their home, or lose my job because I wouldn't make false statements on a report, that I should consider it a blessing. He is saying these are not issues to explode over, rather we are to see them as a blessing. Wow!

In the same sermon, Luke 6:27–29 recounts what Jesus said this way:

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also; and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either.

Our response to the verbal, physical or psychological attacks of others is not retribution, but love instead. He is not advocating passivity but rather a response that is measured, controlled and godly.

Matthew also records Jesus comparing anger and calling someone names to murder (5:21–22):

*You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' ²²But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty **enough to go** into the fiery hell.*

A classic passage that I have heard taught to defend our occasional bout with our tempers is when Jesus cleansed the temple of animal traders and money changers. Most presentations are not defending outbursts of anger but rather sympathizing with the person who is angry or has anger issues by explaining that even Jesus expressed anger. They say, "To be angry is human; after all even Jesus was angry when . . ." and they go on to describe the events of the cleansing.

Before we get to the specific passages that deal with this event, I would like to start by looking at the life of Christ in a host of other contexts. You will see that how He handled Himself in the temple cleansing is congruent with how He handles Himself in every other situation.

It is abundantly clear that Jesus viewed Himself as a man of great authority because of the way He conducted Himself and spoke "as one having great authority." However, He owned nothing, had no position of influence, was poor, and relied on others to provide for His food, clothing and shelter. Let's look at His authority in several verses from the book of Matthew:

- **His teaching is authoritative**

In 7:28a–29, after teaching on the mountainside, the response to His message was:

*The crowds were amazed at His teaching; ²⁹for He was teaching them as **one** having authority, and not as their scribes.*

- **His Word has authority over nature**

In 8:23–27 the disciples witnessed Him rebuke the wind and the waves of the sea. Their response in 27b was:

What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?

- **He has authority over the spirit world as well**

In 8:32a He cast the demons out of the two possessed men and sent them into the swine:

And He said to them, "Go!" And they came out.

- **Jesus has authority to forgive sins**

In 9:2 he says to a paralytic man that his sins are forgiven. Then in verse 6 Jesus says:

But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . "Get up, pick up your bed and go home."

- **He has authority over sickness**

In 9:20–22 Jesus is approached by someone who is sick with a 12-year hemorrhage and, just touching His garment, she is healed.

- **He has authority over death**

In 9:18–25 a synagogue official's daughter died and he approaches Jesus to ask if He would come and lay hands on her. When Jesus touches her, she comes back to life.

- **He has authority over physical ailments**

In 9:27–30 He heals two men who were blind.

- **He gives His authority to His disciples**

In 10:1 Jesus transfers His authority to His disciples:

Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

In verse 8 Jesus says:

*Heal **the** sick, raise **the** dead, cleanse **the** lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.*

It is clear from just this sampling of verses from the life of Christ that what He did and what He said had its basis in His authority as the Son of God. It is with this same authority that He enters the temple and “cleans house.” Mark tells us that the day before the cleansing incident, Jesus has His triumphal entry on the back of a colt (11:1–10). Then in verse 11:

*Jesus entered Jerusalem **and came** into the temple; and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.*

It is Passover in Jerusalem and Jesus scopes out the temple and finds it full of salesmen, cattle, sheep and money changers. So when He returns the next day, it is no surprise to anyone that these men are in the temple. We pick up the story in Matthew 21:12–13. Jesus returns to Jerusalem,

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹³And He said to them, “It is written, ‘MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER’; but you are making it a ROBBERS’ DEN.”

Nowhere in this verse, or in the context of this passage, or in the accounts of Mark and Luke which are similar to that of Matthew do we see anger.

John’s description in 2:14–22 adds some insight into why the cleansing was not motivated by anger at all. Verse 17 says, “His disciples remembered that it is was written ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.’” The word for zeal in this passage is *zelos* and does not have the same meaning or root that the word anger comes from. It means to have an intense positive interest in something; fervor; ardor; or strong enthusiasm.¹ Some folks teaching on this subject have said that Jesus was acting out of righteous indignation. The text just simply does not support this.

To help clear up the matter more, John’s testimony of the event goes on to describe a conversation that Jesus had with the Jews right after He drove everyone out (2:18): “The Jews then said to Him, ‘What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?’” Jesus replied with

(2:19b), “Destroy this temple.” Clearly the crowd was astonished and amazed that this “prophet” would have the gall to come there and run everyone out. Amazingly, they did not question what happened. They simply wanted to know what sign He was delivering by doing this.

Lastly, and most importantly, when Jesus returned the day after the cleansing, He was immediately confronted by the religious authorities. Matthew 21:23 says:

When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

You see, the cleansing was all about authority. Jesus had demonstrated His authority over everything else; demons, sickness, death, the physical world, and now He was exercising His authority in the temple.

By way of illustration, this same scenario is played out daily in the life of a drug enforcement officer. He gets the word that he is going to do a drug bust. The night before the bust, he goes by the house he will “cleanse” the next day. Then he goes home and develops his strategy, gets a warrant and some help. With the warrant, comes the authority to break in, make arrests, and shoot people who are armed and don’t surrender. When the narcotics squad arrives on the scene, they don’t knock on the door and ask permission to come in. They kick the door in, turn over the tables and mattresses, and drive out all who are buying and selling because they have the authority to do so. It is not about anger. It is about zeal for the law. Filled with the zeal of the Lord, Jesus exercised His authority over all things spiritual and cleansed the temple.

Matthew records many other illustrations of Jesus handling conflict. In every case, we hear Him either talk about forgiveness (Matthew 18:21); reproach (11:20); rebuke (16:23); reproof (18:15); or mercy (18:33). Rarely do we see Him angry.

In Mark 3:1–5, we have a marvelous example of how to handle our anger. Jesus had entered into a synagogue on the Sabbath and found a man with a withered hand (4–5a):

And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. ⁵After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

He healed the man’s hand. Nothing else was said, there were no fits, and no angry words. What a great example of entering into the feeling but staying objective and calm in the moment. If we could do the same kind of thing when we are getting angry, let the anger come out of our eyes and not our mouths, it would go a long way to preserve unity and oneness in our relationships.

There is so much more in the life of Christ that we could describe here to defend the idea that anger expressed verbally or physically is risking being ungodly. Although Jesus had lots of reasons to get mad, He rarely showed it. When He did, it was completely under control.

Jesus spoke volumes to us about how to handle rejection, betrayal, injustice, cruelty, shame, embarrassment, and even torture. From the moment of His arrest to His death, He had countless opportunities to become angry, but He did not. His composure was supernatural. It had to be. He

was fully man and fully God, but He had surrendered His will to the Father. That was the only way He could have endured all the abuse. It is the same for us. In order to endure all the stuff life deals our way, we have to continually surrender our life to the Father, particularly when we are tempted to verbalize our anger.

Paul on Anger

Several years ago, I was at a staff pastors' retreat in the piney woods of East Texas. There were about 20 or so of us gathered together to discuss the effectiveness of our ministry. One of the subjects discussed that day involved the role of the pastors' wives in our ministry plans. The senior pastor and one of the more senior associates went "toe to toe" over this issue. As the discussion heated up, the rest of us were riveted to our seats, barely breathing. They had a very sharp disagreement on how we were to minister to the wives of our pastors. The debate went on for over 20 minutes. When they were finished, the problem was not solved and neither side had won. They were both convinced that their perspective was closer to reality and was the best answer to the issue.

The amazing thing I noticed was the amount of healthy respect each side gave to the other person. Even though they delivered their respective views passionately, they never were ugly, demeaning, manipulative, sarcastic, demanding, accusatory, or assigning blame. The respect they showed each other was incredible. Ironically, the argument didn't polarize these men nor anyone listening. Rather, it proved the love, esteem, and respect that each of them had for the other. My respect for both of them grew as well.

In the same way, I can imagine that the apostle Paul in Acts 15:36–39 had a difference of opinion with his missionary partner Barnabas: "And there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another" (39a). Without already having seen the two pastors I mentioned above have this kind of respectful "fencing" over a personally held belief or opinion, I would not be able to see that it was possible for Paul and Barnabas to have such a sharp debate without necessarily fighting with angry words over the issue. Paul would argue that there is room to sharply debate issues. However, measure your words, watch your tone, and be careful in both what you say and how you say something.

Paul sets the bar pretty high when it comes to handling our disputes with others. In Ephesians 4, he outlines several principles to keep in mind about this issue. He starts by exhorting us to walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling. He says, in verses 2–3, to walk "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Our attitude is humility and our goal is unity. The caveat however, is the phrase "one another." Unity is not practiced in a vacuum. We are to relate to one another in humility. It takes both people to accomplish this.

Two times in this chapter, he tells us that we are to speak truth. In verse 25, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another."

Boldly, courageously and graciously we are to tell others the truth about Christ, the truth about our lives, and the truth about their lives.

In the context of telling the truth in a loving manner we read, “BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Ephesians 4:26). Paul is affirming that at times we are going to get angry, but we are not to stay angry. He goes on to warn us that if we stay angry and don’t deal with the issue, we might give the devil an opportunity or a foothold in our life. Anger left unaddressed will turn to resentment, bitterness and unforgiveness. Paul exhorts us to act on it right away.

A further exhortation found here in Ephesians 4 is in verse 31: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” This is a short list of six things that Paul warns them to put away. But when you look at all the other words Paul uses to warn us not to sin or live in the flesh, the list becomes extensive. I have compiled most of the words into one list along with the references where these words can be found.

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|----------------|-----------------------|
| Abusive speech | Guile |
| Anger | Hate |
| Angry tempers | Hypocrisy |
| Arguments | Irreconcilable |
| Arrogance | Jealousy |
| Boasting | Lying |
| Brutal | Malice |
| Clamor | Malicious gossips |
| Coarse jesting | Murder |
| Conceited | Outbursts of anger |
| Deceit | Quarrels |
| Disputes | Reckless |
| Dissensions | Revilers |
| Disturbances | Silly Talk |
| Enmities | Slander |
| Envy | Strife |
| Factions | Treacherous |
| Filthiness | Without self-control |
| Gossip | Worldly empty chatter |
| Greed | Wrath |

(Galatians 5:3, 19; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Romans 1:29; Ephesians 4:30; Colossians 3:8; 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:16,23, 3:2; Titus 3:1)

After reading all these passages and meditating on the different words Paul uses to warn us about creating disunity through sin, I was amazed to see how many of the problems he lists have to

do with the use of our mouth. Virtually every one of the words that refer to a sin in these lists can show up in our verbal expression. Take another look at the words above and consider how easy it is to sin with our words. Anger is only one of them.

What motivates your anger? Is it jealousy? Bitterness? Conceit? Lack of self-control? What? Paul says get rid of it. It is crippling you, your relationships, and the cause of Christ. Listen to Paul carefully. He is affirming that we do get angry. However, he has clearly stated that if angry comments cross your lips or if you are a huffy angry person given to a temper or outbursts of anger, you are likely living in the flesh, are carnal, or just sinning.

Peter on Anger

Suffering at the hands of others is an opportunity to live out our purpose and calling.

In 1 Peter 2:13–3:9 we all are exhorted to submit to those in authority over us regardless of how we are being treated. He says in 2:13–14a, 18–19:

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors.

*¹⁸Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹For this **finds** favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*

I am not a proponent of encouraging people to stay in situations that are abusive. Rather, using their wisdom, I encourage people to find a way to get relief. In the home, this may mean calling the pastor in; at work, it may mean changing jobs; in a school setting, it may mean an intervention by the parents and teachers; in the neighborhood, it may mean calling the police. “Bears up under sorrows” (19b) doesn’t mean passive inactivity. It does mean that we do not revile in return, we stay cool and objective, and we pursue a remedy for the situation.

Unjust and unfair treatment abounds in our culture and around the world. Peter is describing a supernatural response to the ill treatment many of us have to face from time to time. Retribution, retaliation and rage are not part of a godly response. He supports his exhortation to endure patiently by stating that it is part of our calling and purpose, in 2:21–23:

*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting **Himself** to Him who judges righteously.*

We are to keep a faith perspective during difficult trials. Never forget that God sees all and will rescue us either through the trial or out of it. Anger expressed in any form is foreign to the response that Peter is exalting.

James on Anger

Our anger does not achieve the righteousness of God. Before moving on to the passages that help us curb our propensity for outbursts of anger or for resorting to anger as a coping mechanism, I would like to quote two verses from the book of James (1:19–20) out of three different translations. It is hard to find a more compelling and terse directive than this about the issue of anger:

*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak **and** slow to anger; ²⁰for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (1:19b–20, New American Standard Bible).*

Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear. God's righteousness doesn't grow from human anger (1:19–20, The Message).

*Let every man be quick to hear [a ready listener], slow to speak, slow to take offense **and** to get angry.
²⁰For man's anger does not promote the righteousness God [wishes and requires] (1:19b–20, Amplified Bible).*

James just told us in the previous verses that we are to count all adversity as an occasion for joy and celebration. Trials and struggles have the potential to build godly character if we view them from this perspective. But anyone who has been a Christian very long, understands that being joyful during some trials is very challenging.

In addition to staying joyful, James exhorts us to be careful how we listen to others. This would include those who lead and teach us and those who oppose our teaching or leadership. This includes any situation where conflict erupts; in the home, at the office, on the baseball field, in our ministry teams, small groups, or with extended family or ex-family. To accomplish what God intends for a conflictual situation, leave anger out. I don't think that it could be stated more clearly, "Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose" (1:20, Good News Translation).

What to do About My Anger and the Anger of Others

Remember to keep an eternal perspective. It is imperative to remember that we have been told we are going to suffer hardship and trials. James tells us this clearly, as we have already seen, and so does Peter. In 1 Peter, we are told to keep a heavenly perspective on our trials:

*In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, **being** more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6–7).*

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you (1 Peter 4:12).

When we are tempted to get verbally expressive with our anger over trials, we have got to remind ourselves of these truths.

In Ephesians 4:29, Paul gives us what I think is the best passage for handling our conflictual situations when we are tempted to spew out our anger on someone. He says:

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a **word** as is good for edification according to the need **of the moment**, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

If we can use this verse alone to be the “governor” on how we say what we say, it is very likely that angry words will not spill out of our mouths.

Just after this in verse 32, Paul gives us more instruction on how to handle conflictual situations. He says:

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Forgiveness is a huge part of being able to stay objective in tough situations. We will have a lengthy discussion of this issue in chapter 10, “Forgiveness.”

To handle difficult emotions at home and with friends, we are challenged with these words in 1 Peter 3:8–9:

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; ⁹not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Solomon has some great advice on how to handle anger in the book of Proverbs:

*He who restrains his words has knowledge,
And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding (17:27).
He who guards his mouth and his tongue,
Guards his soul from troubles (21:23).*

*He who gives an answer before he hears,
It is folly and shame to him (18:13).*

*A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger,
And it is his glory to overlook a transgression (19:11).*

*Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man,
But any fool will quarrel (20:3).*

*The one who guards his mouth preserves his life;
The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin (13:3).*

*The wise in heart will be called understanding,
And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness (16:21).*

*A fool is quick-tempered,
but a wise person stays calm when insulted (12:16, NLT).*

Some of you may be thinking, “OK, I believe that I am not supposed to give in to my feelings of anger and voice those feelings in an angry expression, but I don’t have the power to stop. I get swept into a verbal battle so easily with some people. What do I do in the moment I am tempted to verbalize my frustration in anger?”

I recommend remembering three things:

1. Be armed with God’s Word
2. Know the limits of what you can say
3. Surrender to the Spirit

First, you must be armed with a way of escape. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, we have a wonderful promise when we are tempted to sin. It says:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Second, you must know what to say in those situations. Let me repeat Ephesians 4:29, as it gives us the boundaries of the vocabulary we can use:

*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a **word** as is good for edification according to the need **of the moment**, so that it will give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).*

Third, we are to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to give us self-control in moments of temptation. This doesn’t mean that I ask the Spirit to give me the *ability* to be controlled. It means that I surrender myself to Him for control of my tongue and my temper. Without surrendering to the Spirit’s control in the moment, we are very likely to fail. The fruit of the Spirit is exactly that, the Spirit in charge in me. It is not the infusion of some spiritual power to enable my flesh to cope. In the heat of the moment, I have to pray and surrender to Him. When I do this, He has the freedom to live His life through me. Just like a glove has no power or life in itself, neither do we when we

surrender to the Spirit's control. He fills us with Himself and the evidence is genuine love, joy, peace, patience, self-control, etc. When we surrender to Him, people will recognize it and we will witness the Spirit at work firsthand. This brings glory to God and encourages our faith.

In conclusion, you cannot read all this Scripture and come away with any conviction other than when I get angry, in almost all cases, I just need to bite my tongue. May God grant you the joy of entering into conflictual situations with a new sense of joy, blessing and expectation to see the Spirit at work.

Remember Proverbs 16:32:

*He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.*

1. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich (eds.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 337.